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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ AND MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, March 15, focuses on Israel's raid of the Jericho prison to capture PFLP leader Ahmad Sa'adat. Reports include remarks made by Jordan's official spokesperson warning of the repercussions of the Jericho raid and asking Israel to immediately halt its operations.

Editorial Commentary on Jericho Prison Raid

-- "Diplomacy of tanks"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/15) editorializes: "Exposing the barbaric mentality of the Israeli occupation forces, Israeli tanks and bulldozers stormed the Jericho prison in the West Bank to arrest Ahmad Sa'adat of the PFLP. The operation came after American and British observers withdrew from the prison . suggesting collusion on the part of these observers! Israel is exercising the diplomacy of tanks as part of the elections campaign for the Ehud Olmert's party, Kadima. It is an innovative method of Israeli election campaigning, more than once depending on the blood and abuse of the Palestinians to gain popularity and votes. Israel is a 'state' but it is really more of a gang. It does not belong to the civilized world or to humanity. How else do we understand getting to an imprisoned and unarmed person, like Ahmad Sa'adat, by destroying buildings and wall with tanks and bulldozers? Is there not one single genuine person in this 'civilized' world who would protest the infliction of ruin and harm to an entire people's dignity, pride and humanity, a people living in a huge prison, just like Ahmad Sa'adat? Once again, Israel proves it does not bother with the international community or human values. It is a rogue terrorist state that reproduces and reinvests the age of barbarism. Nothing works with it except the language of force. So from now on, no one can blame the victim if he chooses to defense his right to live!"

-- "Is it not time for this international hypocrisy to end?"

Daily Columnist Oraib Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/15): "With its rude and provocative attack on Jericho prison . Olmert's government crosses whatever lines are left in its mad war against the Palestinian people, a war that has escalated significantly since the Palestinian elections and before the very eyes of the world and with the unfortunate collusion of the international community that is intent on pressuring Hamas to stop the violence.. The world is focused on demanding that Hamas recognize the agreements, as if Israel's attack on the Jericho prison is the best expression of abiding by agreements.. They ask Hamas to acknowledge Israel's right to exist, but they keep silent about Olmert's plan to demark the borders of his occupying entity unilaterally and without any concern for international accords and agreements.. Who should decry violence and respect agreements and acknowledge the other's right to exist? Is it the Palestinians who are killed, rendered homeless and suffer from attacks and sieges, or are the Israelis who, with their barbaric practices, embody the concept of organized state terrorism in its dirtiest form?"

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

-- "From democracy to civil war!"

Columnist Jawad Bashiti writes on the op-ed page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/15): "The United States will not stay militarily one day more after completing its mission in Iraq. This is the Bush Administration's permanent answer for

the question 'when are you leaving?'. The problem here lies in the mystery of the 'mission', since no one can even claim to know its nature or details.. Arriving in Iraq was for a reason the world did not believe, although the Bush Administration demonstrated unshakable faith. The Saddam Hussein regime owns an arsenal of biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction, and thus toppling that regime by invading and occupying Iraq was a must, because this was the only way to capture those weapons. Expectations then were that the United States would not stay one day more after completing its mission, namely the destruction of the weapons. But the mission was never completed, because the search for the arsenal was in effect like searching for the phoenix. The justification of the U.S. arrival in Iraq collapsed, and so staying there required a convincing reason. Enabling the Iraqis to build a democratic ruling regime to be the model of democracy on the Arab and regional levels became the new reason or the new mission, after which the U.S. military presence in Iraq will not stay one day more! This reason soon collapsed, as the new Iraqi ruling regime and its fallout became the disaster that Arab people had to try to avoid.. Once the higher model of democracy, along with the climate of a 'nuclear conflict' between the United States and Iran, transformed into a civil war-inducing power between the Shiites and the Sunnis, another reason was devised to stay in Iraq. Preventing the civil war, and not spreading democracy, became the objective of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. However, if the Iraqis insist on aborting the Bush administration's endeavor to stop the civil war as they had stopped its endeavor to bring them democracy, then it would keep its forces in Iraq but make it neutral, meaning that it would not be party to the imminent civil war! Its army will walk out of the playing field and stand watching until the Iraqis exhaust themselves in a civil war, which the United States would use to fuel its battle with Iran and its battle to give Israel more reasons to be strategically superior. Therefore, the Iraqi civil war is, as of now, the Bush administration's first choice for Iraq and the region."

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